

Motivation for study abroad in Bangladesh: Learning from the Tokushima University Alumni

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要旨：バングラデシュは若者が多く、海外への留学ニーズが高まっている。日本に留学したバングラデシュ人は、帰国後に成功したキャリアを積む事例が多いが、バングラデシュでは日本語の人気はなく、日本へ留学するバングラデシュ人も増加はみられない。今回、現在のバングラデシュ人の留学傾向、日本語の教育状況、日本への留学の動機および留学へのハードルを分析した。

キーワード：日本語教育、留学生、バングラデシュ

1. Introduction and Objectives

Tertiary enrolment in Japan is projected to decrease by over 25% between 2018 and 2031 due to low birth rates. Some national universities also face financial difficulties and operate below capacity. Attracting international students has been one strategy. Japan, as a major international education hub for higher education, is attracting more and more international students from many countries, is already going beyond the 300,000 international students target. However, statistics has shown that number of students enrolled at public universities which located faraway from metropolitan areas are not actually increased. Japanese universities are now putting more effort on attracting international students. So far, Bangladeshi students consist of a significant part among the number of international students in Japan. Many of them are successful in their further career as university professors, scientists and public officials in Bangladesh. Tokushima University (TU) is one of the attractive destinations for Bangladeshi students. Since the 90s', many Bangladeshi graduate students, researchers, scholars came to TU to study.



Figure 1. A classroom in the Rajshahi University

Mainly based on the data collected from discussion and opinion exchange with TU alumni from Rajshahi University, this paper is aiming to explore: (1) factors influencing decision making process for study abroad and current trends and preference of studying abroad for Bangladeshi students; and (2) situation of Japanese language education and possibilities for applying the “Pre-arrival admission system” or other possible cooperation.

2. Background

Bangladesh has a huge population and human resources. Education in Bangladesh is 5-3-2-2 system. The official language is Bengali. Some schools offer English-based education, but most citizens only speak Bengali.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972, Japan has been contributing to the economic development of Bangladesh as the largest economic cooperation partner, and the relationship between the two countries is in very good condition. Japanese Embassy and JICA are major donors of scholarships for study and research in Japan. Study in Japan fair is regularly organized by JASSO.

Since 90s', more than 60 students, researchers and scholars graduated or completed their education in TU. About half of them have returned to Bangladesh, mostly have become professors and lead an active academic life in various universities of Bangladesh. As a result, the TU International Students Alumni Association (Bangladesh) has been established in February 2020 and headquartered at Rajshahi University.

3. Method

Data collection was conducted qualitatively by face to face discussion and opinion exchange with

Bangladeshi educators, professors, including alumni of TU and Japanese expats in Bangladesh.

The contents of discussion were focused on the motivation of Bangladeshi students to study abroad, factors related to study abroad decision, preferences of countries and destinations, career path after graduation, image of Japanese education system during the decision-making process etc.

Data collection was conducted at sites and meetings below: (1) Rajshahi University; (2) TU Alumni Association Meeting in Dhaka (07 February 2020); (3) Tokushima University.

4. Findings

4.1. Factors influencing decision making process for study abroad of Bangladeshi students



Figure 2. IT practice room in Rajshahi University

Higher education in Bangladesh over the past decades is improved with the establishment of more public and private universities. Bangladesh approved first private university in 1992. Now there are 95 such universities, in addition to the 37 public universities. Universities provide education in both Bengali and English media. However, many students prefer foreign education, which opens a portal to new opportunities. The number of Bangladeshi students going abroad for world-class degrees is increasing gradually. There are 60,390 Bangladeshis pursuing higher education abroad, including 34,155 enrolled at universities in Malaysia, 5,441 in the US, 4,652 in Australia, 3,599 in the UK, 2028 in Canada, 2008 in Germany, 1099 in India, 870 in Saudi Arabia, 810 in Japan (1.34%) and 637 in the United Arab Emirates (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017). Several professors of Rajshahi University reported that the English-speaking countries are the destination of choice. Furthermore, even if the country's language is not English, then they may choose the university where English program is available. Traditionally,

the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, Germany and India are the most popular destinations, but in recent years, Asian countries like Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Japan, China are also trendy. Despite having advanced education system, Japan's share is relatively low compared to other countries.

Factors influencing motivation of Bangladeshi students to go abroad are probably several. The students are going abroad can compete at global level and can find better employment prospects. Majority of these students do not return after completing their study or training and start living in foreign countries, especially English-speaking countries. Here often, professors give advises to students about their destination carefully, who want to go abroad for education and/ or research.



Figure 3. Laboratory Equipment at Rajshahi University

From educational perspective, inadequate facilities of Bangladesh education system is one of the major causes for brain drain. “The laboratories are ill equipped and the quality of education is very poor”, a faculty staff said. Most of the universities have shortage of advanced equipment and laboratories, which is essential for experimental research. Shortage of highly qualified faculty staff is also a problem. “Socio-economic situation with no effective development such as traffic jams in Dhaka to limited employment opportunities in Bangladesh, that's why so many students are leaving the country”, he said.

From economic perspective, usually Bangladeshi students going abroad are from the higher social status, but with time, students from higher middle class are also going abroad for world class degrees. Students now prefer the Malaysian universities because of lower education cost while many Malaysian universities have international collaboration, joint program with the UK, the US and other countries. Tuition fee per semester for

international students in Malaysia could be less than half of the average tuition fees in Japan, while cost for living is substantially lower.

However, despite much higher average tuition fee than Japan, the US, the UK or Australia still top the list of popular destination due to the native English language advantage.

Among English non-native countries, Germany stands out with full tuition exemption, abundant of scholarship and English course for undergraduate level. This is quite similar to situation of Japan; however, many Japanese universities are not providing undergraduate courses in English yet.

Many students who are interested to study in Japan say that their decision is influenced by their parents or relatives who have been studied in Japan. Most of them have some basic Japanese skills and have plan for applying for MEXT scholarship.

There are many other reasons that restrict potential students to go abroad besides factors of motivation, economic, preference etc. An engineer from Rajshahi University said: "I want to go to Japan for my master degree, however because I just became a government employee, so I have to wait for 2 years then they can give me a permission to go".

Recently, there is an increasing number of Japan-related companies interested in hiring local staff who can speak Japanese. Apparel-related companies require a certain level of Japanese language proficiency, as well as technical and business professional skills. "It seems that further expansion of Japanese companies will lead to an increase in the number of Japanese learners and an increase in willingness to study in Japan", a local lawyer said. "Bangladeshi society emphasizes degrees and certificates. That's why a foreign degree, including Japan degree is respected and essential for finding employment".

From the discussion with Japan alumni and local Bangladeshi, the motivation for studying in Japan is to get a degree, to improve qualifications and proficiency, to increase the chance for employment abroad or even in Bangladesh, and interest in Japan's cultures.

However, low share of students bound for Japan could be explained by constrained pulling factors of Japanese universities: (1) limited number of universities offer English program for undergraduate; (2) difficulty in studying Japanese language to the level that can pass EJU and entrance examination; (3) low chance for finding employment and settle in Japan; (4) limited number of scholarship and information on study on private expenses; (5) limited life conditions for Islamic population (halal food, praying etc.).

4.2. Situation of Japanese language education in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, many Japanese language schools are in operation especially in Dhaka areas. The courses are mostly beginner or conversational level designed for students who intend to study in Japan, employees of local Japanese companies etc. According to a professor at Dhaka University, soon after the independence of Bangladesh, a Japanese language school was established in the Japanese embassy in Bangladesh in 1972, then Japanese was introduced as a foreign language course at the Faculty of International Relations, Dhaka University. From 1983 to the present, a four-year non-degree Japanese language course has been established with Japanese teachers dispatched from Japan Foundation and JICA. Since 2017, the Bachelor of Japanese Language and Culture course has been established at Dhaka University, which enrolled more than 200 students. The Japanese Universities Alumni Association in Bangladesh (JUAAB) was established since 2000, also has been running Japanese conversation courses.

A professor of Rajshahi University said that Japanese language course (beginner level) was started at Rajshahi University in 1996. Rajshahi University has Japanese certificate course offered by the Institute of languages for 60 lectures and a final examination.

According to a survey conducted by Japan Foundation in 2015, there are 37 institutions delivering Japanese education in Bangladesh, employing 94 teachers, with total number of learners exceeding 2,158 people. Among learners, 29.2% are university students, 5.9% are secondary students.

The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) has been conducted since 2001, and the number of examinees is 946 (2017, 1st). In general, learners are concentrated on the JLPT N5.

Regarding motivation for studying Japanese, many learners aim to study abroad by MEXT scholarship or self-funded. They often completed the beginner level. For other learners who start studying Japanese in hopes of studying abroad or finding a job in the future, but overall interest in Japanese is not so high. Some learners are studying Japanese motivated by Japanese culture, ikebana, bonsai, Japanese cinema, karate, pop culture animation etc.

5. Conclusion

Japan has an important influence in Bangladesh in terms of economic collaboration projects executed by JICA and other Japanese enterprises. Japan also has a very strong intellectual presence in Bangladesh since many of Japan alumni have become influential intellectuals in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi students

have increasing need to study abroad for a higher degree. Bangladeshi people have friendly attitude towards Japan and have high interest towards studying in Japan. Japanese universities could strengthen pulling factors to attract more students from Bangladesh by: (1) introducing English program for undergraduate degree; (2) supporting Japanese language study; (3) supporting employment and settle in Japan; (4) increasing number of scholarship and information on part-time job for self-funded students; (5) providing supportive environment in and outside campus.

It seems not feasible to recruit undergraduate students by “Pre-arrival admission system” at this stage, because there are no Japanese language class for specialized subjects such as math, physics etc., as well as lacking of EJU preparation system.

However, recruiting graduate students could be possible. Bangladeshi universities have high interest on cooperation and exchange activities with Japanese universities. Organizing study fair, event, presentation sessions, personal counseling in collaboration with alumni to attract private students could be possible approaches for recruiting students.

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